DECISION RECORD

Decision: It is my decision to authorize the issuance of a term grazing permit/lease of public lands on the Good's Ranch, Allotment #65013. Any additional mitigation measures identified in the environmental impacts sections of the attached environmental assessment have been formulated into stipulations, terms and conditions. Any comments made to this proposed treatment were considered and any necessary changes have been incorporated into the environmental assessment.

Signed by T. R. Kreager — 6/30/99
Assistant Field Manager — Date

Environmental Assessment for Grazing Allotment 65013

I. Background

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A. Introduction

When authorizing livestock grazing on public range, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has historically relied on a land use plan and environmental impact statement to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). A recent decision by the Interior Board of Land Appeals, however, affirmed that the BLM must conduct a site-specific NEPA analysis before issuing a permit or lease to authorize livestock grazing. This environmental assessment fulfills the NEPA requirement by providing the necessary site-specific analysis of the effects of issuing a new grazing lease on Allotment 65013.

The scope of this environmental assessment is limited to the effects of issuing a new grazing lease on Allotment 65013. Over time, the need could arise for subsequent management activities which relate to grazing authorization. These activities could include vegetation treatments (e.g., prescribed fires, herbicide projects), range improvement projects (e.g., fences, water developments), and others. Future management actions related to livestock grazing would be addressed in project-specific NEPA documents as they are proposed.

B. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of issuing a new grazing lease would be to authorize livestock grazing on public range on Allotment 65013. The lease would be needed to specify the types and levels of use authorized, and the terms and conditions of the authorization pursuant to 43 CFR 4130.3, 4130.3-1, and 4130.3-2.

C. Conformance with Land Use Planning

Upon review of the Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (Bureau of Land Management 1997), the proposed action was found to conform with the Record of Decision as required by 43 CFR 1610.5-5.

D. Relationships to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

The proposed action and alternatives are consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1700 et seq.); the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.), as amended; the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.), as amended; the Endangered Species Act (ESA) (16 U.S.C. 1535 et seq.) as amended; the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.); Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management; and Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands.

II. Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action:

To authorize the grazing lease on the Ike Good allotment # 65013 for 29 AU's (348 AUMs at 100% public land). Specifically, to authorize a grazing lease for 29 cows from March 1 to the last day of February of each year at 100% public land, **and;**

Continue current livestock management practices.

B. Change livestock management alternatives:

Alternative number 1:

To authorize the grazing lease on the Ike Good allotment #65013 for 29 AU's (348 AUMs at 100% public land). Specifically, to authorize a grazing lease for 29 cows from March 1 to the last day of February of each year at 100% public land,**and;**

Construct a north-south fence in the northwest pasture to divide the pasture into two pastures and establish a rotational, deferment grazing schedule.

Change management Category from a "C" to "I" based upon resource concerns identified with the prairie chicken.

Monitor vegetative condition and lesser prairie chicken habitat requirements.

This alternative was considered, presented to leaseholder and owner and was rejected by them. They felt the north-south fence would not be advantageous to their grazing operation.

Alternative number 2: (Preferred)

To authorize the grazing lease on the Ike Good allotment #65013 for 29 AU's (348 AUMs at 100% public land). Specifically, to authorize a grazing lease for 29 cows from March 1 to the last day of February of each year at 100% public land,**and; the following actions must be completed to implement this alternative.**

The BLM will construct a 4-strand barbwire fence in the Northwest pasture that will include the existing public and state trust lands and private lands. This fence will start on the south section line between section 6 and section 32 of T. 6 S., R. 30 E. and continue eastward to the existing north-south pasture fence located in the southeast corner of section 34. (See Alternative 2 Map). Once the fence is constructed, the new pasture containing the public land will be used on a seasonal basis. Specific season of use is defined in the terms and conditions.

Change management Category from a “C” to “I” based upon resource concerns identified with the prairie chicken.

Monitor vegetative condition and lesser prairie chicken habitat requirement.

Current livestock grazing practices will continue until the preferred alternative and attached terms and conditions can be fully implemented. Changes to the current grazing practices may be requested by the BLM through the consultation and coordination process with the permittee/lessee. A suggested modification to the current practices may be to not graze the Northwest pasture during winter months.

Proposed Terms and Conditions:

The following are terms and conditions specific to the northwest pasture that will be implemented under the preferred alternative (#2). These terms and conditions will not become effective until all actions and projects have been fully implemented. Changes to these terms and conditions may be initiated by either party under the consultation and coordination process.

Season of use:- Grazing will be allowed for a maximum of three months each year. Seasonal use may vary from year to year, however, for the first three years grazing will occur between 6/1 and 9/1 of each year. After year 3, the three month grazing period may be switched to allow for fall/winter use .

RAND to make changes for season-0f-use !!!!

Livestock numbers: In consultation between BLM and the lessee, livestock numbers within the Northwest pasture may be set prior to the grazing period each year.

Robel’s vegetative monitoring methodology which has been approved by the five state Lesser Prairie Chicken Interstate Working Group will be implemented to ensure that the lesser prairie chicken habitat requirements are met and maintained. This methodology is available for review at the Roswell Field Office. If prairie chicken habitat requirements are not being met as a result of livestock grazing practices, changes may be necessary.

Livestock grazing management changes may result from periods of abnormal climatic patterns and will depend upon the vegetative condition due to these climatic changes.

C. No Permit/Lease authorization alternative:

This alternative, if selected, would be to not issue a new grazing lease for the Ike Good allotment #65013. No grazing would be authorized on federal land under this alternative..

III. Affected Environment

General Setting

A priority objective of the Roswell Field Office is to restore and maintain prairie chicken habitat. Overtime, we will develop grazing systems on allotments with a high potential for management actions that will maintain/enhance prairie chicken habitat. The plans will include grazing schemes taylored to meet specific management objectives. Generally, these are allotments where there are large blocked federal lands versus small isolated parcels. These are the category of prairie chicken allotments in the Caprock Wildlife Habitat Area we refer to on page 31 of the Final Roswell Resource Management Plan (RMP) .

If you refer to AP8-1, Section 9, of the RMP, you will see a list of allotments, which includes allotment 65013. These allotments contain a small percentage of federal land and/or the parcels are small and scattered. The Bureau may not take the lead in developing grazing management on these allotments, but will encourage coordination and cooperation between our agency, the Soil Conservation Service and State Land Office.

Allotment #65013 is located in Chaves County, about four miles southwest of Kenna. The allotment is made up of five pastures ranging from approximately 3 to 7 sections in size.. This allotment consists of 1,924 acres of Federal land, 2,940 acres of State Land, and approximately 8,320 acres of private land. Currently this allotment is categorized as a “C” or Custodial allotment.

The public lands within this allotment are for the most part landlocked by private and state lands. Surface access to the larger parcel of public land in the northwest pasture is limited. The northwest pasture has most of the public land (approximately 1,800 acres) within this allotment, however it is not a contiguous block. This pasture has approximately 680 acres of state leased land, 1,660 acres of private land and 200 acres of uncontrolled land. The pasture is watered on the west, northeast and southeast portions of the pasture. The land status distribution pattern within this pasture currently makes it impractical to set a different season of use.

This allotment lies outside the Roswell Grazing District Boundary established subsequent to the Taylor Grazing Act and is classified as a Section 15 Grazing Lease. Normally, the permitted use on Section 15 Leases is established by the amount of forage available for livestock on the public lands within the lease. The overall livestock numbers on the allotment are not established by the Bureau of Land Management. In southeast New Mexico, this is due primarily to either the small amount of public land and/or the public lands are situated in small or isolated tracts that can not be managed as efficiently as larger well blocked public lands.

The primary features in the shinnery oak dune (SOD) community are topography influenced by aeolian and alluvial sedimentation on upland plains forming hummocks, dunes, sand ridges and swales and the presence of shinnery oak.

This is a unique community type found primarily below the Llano Estacado or Staked Plains, in an area known as Mescalero Sands. It lies in the Canadian Plains and Southern Desertic Major Land Resource Area, between the elevations of 4,100 feet and 4,300 feet. The topography is gently sloping and undulating sandy plains, with moderate to very steep hummocky dunes of up to ten feet and more in height scattered throughout the area. Some of the dunes are stabilized with vegetation, while a number of them are unstable and shifting. Dune blowouts with shinnery oak and bluestem, either isolated or in dune complexes are common in this community. Annual precipitation for this region averages 12 -13 inches.

The following resources or values are not present or would not be affected by the authorization of livestock grazing on Allotment #65016; Prime/Unique Farmland, Native American Religious Concerns, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Hazardous Wastes, water quality, riparian/wetlands, floodplains, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and Minority/low Income populations.

Cultural inventory surveys would continue to be required for federal actions involving surface disturbing activities except where criteria to exempt surveys are met. Eligible and potential eligible sites would continue to be protected from damage or archaeologically treated to mitigate damage**.**

The impact of the proposed action and alternatives to minority or low-income populations or communities has been considered and no significant impact is anticipated.

A. Affected Resources

1. Soils: The two primary soil units on this ranch are the Faskin-Malstrom association and the Jalmar-Roswell-Pyote association.

Faskin-Malstrom association

Soils are 50% Faskin loamy fine sand and 40% Malstrom loamy fine sand. The Faskin soil is deep and well drained. Permeability of this soil is moderate, available water capacity is high, runoff is medium, water erosion is moderate, while the hazard of soil blowing is very high.

Jalmar-Roswell-Pyote association

Soils are 50% Jalmar fine sand, 20% Roswell fine sand, and 20% Pyote fine sand. Jalmar soils are deep and well drained. Permeability of this soil is moderate, water capacity is

moderate, runoff is slow, water erosion is slight, while the hazard of soil blowing is very high. Roswell soils are deep and excessively drained. Permeability of this soil is rapid, water capacity is low, runoff is slow, water erosion is slight, and hazard of soil blowing is very high. Pyote soils are deep and well drained. Permeability of this soil is moderately rapid, water capacity is moderate, runoff is slow, water erosion is slight, and hazard of soil blowing is very high.

2. Vegetation:

The primary ecological (range) site on the public lands in the northwest pasture is Deep Sand CP-2. The primary ecological (range) site on the remainder of the allotment, which is predominately private and State lands is Sandy Plains CP-2. Key vegetation is shinnery oak with bluestem and dropseed grasses. The Deep Sand community is a unique ecological area dominated by tall and mid-grasses. In many areas, the shinnery oak community has shifted from a dominant sand bluestem/little bluestem/hairy grama grassland with varying amounts of shinnery oak, sand sage and yucca to a community dominated by sand dropseed, red and purple three-awn and hairy grama, with increasing annual forbs, shinnery oak, mesquite, sand sage and yucca. Currently, the Roswell Field Office (RFO) has limited vegetative data for this allotment because of the allotment categorization. There have been no vegetative monitoring studies done on this allotment since the initial vegetation inventory completed in 1980. Data at that time placed the public lands within the mid seral ecological rating at 47%.

The RMP/EIS established resource objectives for the Shinnery Oak Dune community. The vegetative cover by percent composition objectives for the SOD community are grasses 50-70 %, forbs 10-15 %, shrubs & trees 25-40 %. The ground cover objectives for this community are: bare ground 5-20 %, litter 25-70 %, small & large rock 0-1 %, grass & forbs 16-40 % and shrubs & trees 3-17 %.

Recent field review of the public lands on this allotment compared the existing ground cover to the average ground cover for a Deep Sand CP-2 ecological site in a mid seral stage. ***Rand insert veg. Table (see Fields EA for example)***

This review compared the present vegetative resources on the allotment with the area wide average of mid seral conditions for the Deep Sand CP-2 site. The conclusions reached indicate this site is still in a mid seral stage. Average vegetative production composition is a little over 2 % forbs, 38 % grasses and 59 % shrubs and trees. The average vegetative cover composition is 1 % forbs, 57 % grass, 40 % shrubs and 1 % trees. The average ground cover composition for this site is approximately 48 % bare ground, 38 % litter, less than 1 % rock, 8 % grass and forb and 14 % shrub and trees.

The field review reflects the grass component is dominated by bluestems, threeawns, dropseeds, black and hairy grama and a lesser amount of sand paspalum and fall witchgrass; the shrub component is dominated by shinnery oak, sand sage, yucca and some

mesquite; the forb component is comprised of a variety of both annual and perennial species.

The current vegetative resources on this allotment appear to be stable and the rangeland trend is static. Based on “average” vegetation data, the deep sand CP-2 range site on this allotment produces approximately 652 pounds of vegetation per acre. The Bureau quit allocating forage specifically for wildlife in the early 80s. Since then, the wildlife allocation is built into the utilization factor in the range monitoring evaluation program. The northwest pasture, which is approximately 50% public land, has a predominance of shinnery oak and does not provide the structure and composition level of bluestem species required for prairie chicken nesting habitat. Refer to the attached data summary tables.

3. Wildlife:

The Caprock Wildlife Habitat Area (WHA) includes the Good Allotment (65013). The Caprock WHA provides diverse habitat for more than 54 birds species, 33 species of mammals, and 36 species of reptiles and amphibians.

Raptors that are frequently associated with the vegetation types on this allotment are the red-tailed hawk, Swainson's hawk, ferruginous hawk, roughlegged hawk, common nighthawk, and the American kestrel.

Game bird species in this areas include the lesser prairie chicken, scaled and bob white quail, and the mourning dove.

Other bird species that are usually observed are the turkey vulture, roadrunner, chihuahuan raven, great-horned owl, burrowing owl, northern flicker, loggerhead shrike, western meadowlark, western kingbird, pyrrhuloxia, horned lark, and other passerine birds.

At least 33 species of mammals occur on or utilize this allotment. The diversity of small mammals provide for an excellent prey base for carnivores such as the coyote, gray fox, bobcat, raccoon, badger, hooded skunk and striped skunk.

Mammals that provide a prey base include the black-tailed jack rabbit, desert cottontail, spotted ground squirrel, pocket mice, deer mouse, kangaroo rats, northern grasshopper mouse, harvest mice, and the white throated woodrat.

Two big game species that occur on the allotment are pronghorn antelope and mule deer.

Reptiles and amphibians that inhabit the area are the dune sagebrush lizard, southern prairie lizard, lesser earless lizard, side-blotched lizard, longnose leopard lizard, sixlined racerunner, tree lizard, skinks, western diamond back, western rattlesnake, coachwhip, spadefoot toads, western box turtle, and the yellow mud turtle.

4. Threatened/Endangered Species

There are no known federally threatened or endangered species occurring within the proposed action area.

Special Status Species:

Federal threatened, endangered and candidate species as well as state-listed threatened or endangered species potentially occurring within the proposed project area will be analyzed in this document. Candidate species and State listed species do not receive protection under the ESA until proposed. However, within the act and under BLM policy the bureau has an obligation to ensure actions do not contribute to the need to list these species.

There are several Federal Candidate species that occupy or utilize the area. These include the swift fox, lesser prairie chicken, and the mountain plover. For a detailed description of the range, habitat and potential threats to the swift fox and the mountain plover, refer to the Biological Opinion (AP11-38) in the Roswell RMP.

Dune Sagebrush Lizard

The dune sagebrush lizard is listed by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish as Endangered, Group 2 and by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a Category 2, Notice of Review species. The dune sagebrush lizard only occurs in the southeastern corner of New Mexico and the western region of Texas. Within that range its habitat is restricted to active sand dunes and their peripheries (Degenhardt and Jones 1972). Shinnery oak is the dominate plant species that surrounds the top edge of the active sand dune, with a small composition of grasses inside the blowout area.

During 1991 a study was begun to examine the effects of the removal of shinnery oak on lizard habitat. Through five years of research it was demonstrated that there were 70%-94% fewer lizards in treated pastures as compared to non-treated pastures.

Lesser Prairie Chicken

Recently a petition was filed with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to list the prairie chicken as threatened. On June 1, 1998 the FWS announced a finding for the petition. After review of all available scientific and commercial information, the Service finds that listing this species is warranted but precluded by other higher priority actions to amend the Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants. The lesser prairie chicken is added to the Service's candidate species list.

In southeastern New Mexico, lesser prairie chickens exist in the shrub-dominated High Plains Bluestem Subtype by using mixed stands of tall grass and shinnery oak.

Male prairie chickens visit or establish booming grounds (leks) from early March to late May, with the peak booming activity occurring around the middle of April. Booming grounds can be found in mesquite shortgrass, shinnery oak grasslands, shinnery oak dunes, abandoned oil/gas pads, pipelines and roads. The basic requirement for lek sites is visibility of the immediate surroundings (shortgrass and topography)..

Female prairie chickens prefer range in excellent condition for nesting. In areas of shinnery oak, nesting studies (Copelin 1963, Riley 1978) indicate that these birds prefer shinnery oak rangeland habitat dominated by mid and tall grass species. Wisdom (1980) demonstrated that nesting success was enhanced by the presence of tall, wide clumps of sand bluestem, which are found in a few near-climax areas in the shinnery oak-grassland, while areas devoid of sand bluestem were not highly conducive to nesting success. In areas where sand bluestem is scarce, little bluestem apparently serves as an acceptable substitute. (Merchant 1982). Riley et al. (1992) found that most successful nests occurred where basal composition of sand bluestem was greater and the height of vegetation above successful nests averaged 67 cm, while height of vegetation above unsuccessful nests averaged 35 cm. Copelin (1963) found that the most successful nests were placed between clumps of grass residue left from the previous year's growth that provided overhead cover.

Brooding areas are often within habitats which are in lower seral stages usually having a high proportion of bare ground and annual forbs (Riley et al. 1992, Jones 1963).

Food requirements vary among the seasons. Prairie chickens rely heavily (97%) on forbs and other green plant material during the spring and invertebrates in the summer. The early fall diets consist of invertebrates and green plant material, while winter diets consist of mast from shinnery oak.

Above is a general description of prairie chicken habitat requirements. As with most wildlife species, especially upland game birds, precipitation plays a large role in population fluctuations and habitat conditions. Precipitation patterns have fluctuated drastically for the last twenty years. During the middle eighties precipitation was above normal and chicken populations responded very well. With the exception of two years, precipitation has been well below normal during the 1990's.

Current lesser prairie chicken habitat within the allotment is in fair condition (marginal Subtype 2). Most of the bluestems that would provide some nesting habitat are located on private land. Mono-typic stands of shinnery and deeper sandhills exist in the northwestern part of the allotment. Most of the public land lies within this large pasture and would be considered a Subtype 3 according to the habitat descriptions in the Davis study (1979).

Population Monitoring Data

The Roswell Field Office has actively monitored prairie chicken booming grounds, population trends and habitat since the early seventies depending upon workload and availability of personnel to conduct the census. Historically in New Mexico, the Lesser prairie chicken occupied most of the eastern plains. However, numbers and occupied range of the species are much reduced since pre-settlement times; apparently in response to prolonged heavy grazing and brush control in combination with the great drouths of the 1930's and 1950's. It has been reported that currently the Lesser prairie chicken occupies approximately one half their original range in New Mexico. In southeast New Mexico, in our prairie chicken habitat, we received above normal rainfall during the mid-80s. We experienced higher chicken numbers in relation to the grass response, conversely we have witnessed a decline in chicken populations due to the drought conditions we have been in for the past several years.

Since the early 1970's Lesser prairie chicken populations have fluctuated up and down with the highest period occurring during the middle 1980's. On this specific allotment 8 known booming grounds have been documented and monitored, when feasible, for over 25 years. Lesser prairie chicken lek activity has fluctuated over the years. In 1983, when the population appeared to be at its highest, 7 out of the 8 booming grounds were active with an average of number of 16 males per lek. Since that time lek activity has declined. Over the last few years, one or two leks have been known to remain active with an average number of six males per lek. Lek survey results for this allotment are an attachment at the end of the EA.

5. Livestock Management:

The allotment is grazed by cattle. As was stated earlier, the BLM does not normally set the total livestock numbers for a Section 15 Lease. Current allotment information reflects the present livestock operation is a cow-calf and/or yearling herd up to 250 cows or 500 yearlings at any given time (per base property lease filed with BLM). Normal operations are at lower numbers. The lessee utilizes five pastures in a best pasture/deferred rotation system . In shinnery oak dominated pastures livestock are removed during the period that shinnery is toxic, normally mid March and April, to prevent livestock loss. On many occasions the lessee has deferred the shinnery dominated pastures from mid March to the first frost (usually late October),however this is not a consistent action.

6. Visual Resources:

That portion of the allotment adjacent to Highway 70 is in the Class III Visual Resource Management Class, while the remainder of the allotment are in Class IV.

7. Air Quality:

The allotment is in a Class II area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality as defined in the federal Clean Air Act, which allows a moderate amount of air quality degradation. Air quality is generally good, Winds are typically southeasterly during the summer, and becoming southwesterly in the winter and early spring. Winds average 10 miles per hour in the fall and 16 miles per hour in the spring, with peak velocities reaching 50 miles per hour. These conditions rapidly disperse air pollutants in the region.

8. Recreation:

Recreation opportunities are very limited (inaccessible) in this grazing allotment because the public has limited legal/physical access to public lands. The parcels of Public lands within this allotment are scattered and are generally surrounded by private lands. Mule deer, pronghorn antelope, and game birds such as quail and dove are taken during hunting seasons set by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish.

9. Caves and Karst:

A complete significant cave or karst inventory has not been completed for the public lands located in this grazing allotment. Presently, no known significant caves or karst features have been identified within this allotment. If at a later date, a significant cave or karst feature is located on public lands within this allotment, that cave or feature may be fenced to exclude livestock grazing and Off Highway Vehicle Use. A separate Environmental analysis would be prepared to construct this exclosure fence.

This allotment is located within a designated area of Low Karst or Cave Potential.

IV. Environmental Impacts

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action

1. Soils:

The permitted use as described in the proposed action is not anticipated to have any adverse impact to the current soil conditions. Some soil loss would continue to occur due to the windy conditions that prevail in this region during parts of the year. If vegetative cover remains stable soil loss may be minimized.

Changes in vegetative ground cover is often linked to the amount and timing of precipitation events. This assessment is based on the assumption that the area will receive at least the long term average in precipitation both in timing and amount.

2. Vegetation:

The continuance of the permitted use (29 AU's) as established by the amount of forage available for livestock on public land within the lease is not anticipated to have any adverse impact to the current vegetative conditions. The vegetation will continue to be grazed and trampled by domestic livestock as well as other herbivores such as rabbits, rodents and insects. Under the proposed action, it is not anticipated that a significant change in the vegetative composition or amount available for use will occur. The continuance of the present livestock management practices is not anticipated to alter the vegetative composition. The pastures will continue to get some deferment as outlined in the affected environment. Ecological condition and trend is expected to remain stable over the long term at this permit number.

3. Wildlife:

Under the proposed action, domestic livestock will continue to utilize vegetative resources needed by a variety of wildlife species for life history functions within this allotment. The magnitude of livestock grazing impacts on wildlife is dependent upon the species of wildlife being considered, and it's habitat needs. In general, livestock stocking rate adjustments have been made in the past to minimize the direct competition for those vegetative resources needed by a variety of wildlife species. Cover, and other habitat requirements for wildlife will remain the same as the existing situation. The existing situation on the public lands in the Northwest pasture is such that wildlife species requiring a certain amount of grasses for cover, roosting, nesting and forage would continue to be negatively impacted. Maintenance and operation of existing waterings will continue to provide dependable water sources for wildlife, as well as livestock.

4. Threatened/Endangered Species:

Under the proposed action there would be no affect to Federal threatened and endangered species since there are no known T/E occurrences within this allotment.

Special Status Species

Under the proposed action, there would be minimal impacts to the sand dune lizard due to the dispersal of livestock. Areas where there is a concentration of livestock (waterings and fence corners) the habitat may be of lower quality, but these areas are small in nature. Range improvements (pipelines) may enhance lizard habitat by creating open dunal areas that are usually bordered by shinnery oak.

Under the proposed action negative impacts to the lesser prairie chicken would continue. Seasonal habitat requirements for the lesser prairie chicken would remain inadequate. This area may potentially provide brood rearing habitat, but adequate nesting (bluestems), foraging and wintering habitat is in low quality and quantity.

5 Livestock Management:

Under the proposed action there would be no impacts to the current livestock management. The allotment would continue to be grazed in the same manner as it is currently. The larger block of public land in the northwest portion of the allotment would continue to be deferred during the period that shinnery oak is toxic. It would also be anticipated the area would continue to have periodic deferment during other periods of the year.

6. Visual Resources:

The continued grazing of livestock would not affect the form or color of the landscape, or the primary aspect of the vegetation within the allotment.

7. Air Quality:

The impacts to air quality would not change from the current situation. A moderate amount of air quality degradation would continue.

8. Recreation

Grazing would have little or no affect on the recreational opportunities, since the recreating public has no legal or physical access to this parcel of public land. Recreation activities that could occur within this grazing allotment are limited or non-existent due to land patterns.

9. Significant Caves/Karst

No known significant caves or karst features are known to exist on the public lands located within this allotment. Grazing would not affect the karst resources.

B. Impacts from the Change Livestock Management alternative

Alternative number 1:

Changes in livestock management practices are somewhat limited in an allotment having scattered parcels of public land that comprise a small percent of the allotment.

Construction of a pasture fence in the northwest pasture to divide the pasture into two pastures and establish a rotational and deferment scheme for the two pastures has been considered and may be a practical solution in promoting improved rangeland conditions and prairie chicken habitat within this pasture. Under this proposed alternative one pasture would be deferred from grazing each year. The other pasture would have grazing use. The grazed pasture would receive deferment during the shinnery oak toxicity period. The grazed pasture would be fully deferred the next year.

This alternative was presented to the leaseholder and private land owner. They rejected this proposal based on the amount of private and State lands in this pasture and the fact that

having to defer the two pastures alternately every year would interfere with their use of the private and State lands and their current grazing schedule. Therefore, this alternative was dropped from further consideration.

Alternative number 2 (preferred)

This alternative was presented to the leaseholder and private land owner. Under this alternative, the construction of a new pasture fence would have minimal and short lived negative impacts to the soil resources. Surface disturbance would be limited to the areas adjacent to the selected fence route and disturbed areas would revegetate within one or two years. With the construction of the fence and season-of-use stipulation, the vegetative ground cover and species composition is expected to improve since this alternative will aid in the overall management of the allotment. With the current pasture rest rotation system being utilized on the entire allotment and the preferred alternatives season of use grazing system in the northwest pasture, it is anticipated that the lesser prairie chicken habitat requirements would be enhanced. This alternative would benefit most, if not all,l effected resources. Annual vegetation monitoring will track the response of the preferable prairie chicken grasses, particularly the bluestem species.
Rand add season-of-use analysis, six month vs three month

C. Impacts of the No Livestock Grazing Alternative.

The No Livestock Grazing Alternative has been previously analyzed at the National level in the Rangeland Reform '94 EIS and in the Roswell RMP/EIS. An in depth analysis of this alternative will not be made in this document. General impacts under this alternative would include no new rangeland improvement and the removal of existing rangeland improvements unless a determination was made that they were beneficial to other uses. Since no grazing authorizations on public lands would be permitted, livestock operators grazing lands adjoining Federal lands would be responsible for preventing the unauthorized use of these Federal lands. The BLM would not fence these lands. Rangeland administrative emphasis would shift to issuing crossing permits to or from nonfederal land inholdings and resolving unauthorized use.

V. Cumulative Impacts

Under the proposed action there would be no change in the cumulative impacts since it does not vary from the current situation.

Under the change livestock management and/or numbers alternative there would be little change in the cumulative impacts. Livestock management facilities are anticipated to remain stable. Roads might increase if additional land development increased. Livestock would continue to graze the land.

VI. Residual Impacts

Under the proposed action and the no grazing alternative there would be no change in the residual impacts.

Under alternative number 2, approximately 3 more miles of fence would be added to the existing livestock facilities and fencing that dot the landscape.

VII. Mitigating Measures And/Or Permit/Lease Conditions

Under the proposed action and no grazing alternative no mitigating measures are required. Under the change livestock management mitigating measures outlined below may be required.

The fence proposed in alternative number 2, along with the approved terms and conditions will promote enhancement of prairie chicken habitat on the well blocked public lands within this allotment. Since this proposal is agency driven the cost of the fence should be borne by the agency and within agency guidelines. The lessee must be in agreement with the proposal and the terms under which the proposal is implemented.

Under the proposed action, compliance with the grazing regulations (43 CFR Part 4100) will incorporated into the terms of the permit/lease. Refer back to alternative 2 for specific terms and condition to be implemented.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/RATIONALE

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined the **proposed action** will not have significant impacts on the human environment and that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Rationale for Recommendations: The proposed action would not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation. The **proposed action** will be in compliance with the Roswell Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (October, 1997).

_____ _____

T. R. Kreager, Date
Acting Assistant Field Office Manager - Resources

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
for
GRAZING AUTHORIZATION

ALLOTMENT 65013, Section 15

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Bureau of Land Management
Roswell Field Office
Roswell, New Mexico